DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 317 309 PS 018 705

AUTHOR Adams, Polly K.; Parham, Jaynie
TITLE How Does Your Classroom Stack Up?
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Southern Association on Children Under Six (41st, Dallas, TX, March 29-April 1, 1990).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Guidelines; *Instructional Materials; *Learning Activities; Primary Education; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Blocks

ABSTRACT

Initial discussion concerns unit blocks and large blocks, general recommendations on the number of blocks to be provided to students in the primary grades, and a rationale for using blocks in primary school classes. It is asserted that the goals of block building activities are based on the promotion of children's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. These goals are easily met when activities are planned and some guidelines are followed. Three approaches to planning, including the use of task cards, sentence strips, and idea cards, are described and illustrated. It is concluded that unit blocks and large blocks offer children many opportunities for learning and fun. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED317309

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HOW DOES YOUR CLASSROOM STACK UP?

Polly K. Adams, Ph.D.
Professor, Early Childhood
Columbus College
School of Education
Columbus, Georgia 31993
(404) 568-2255

Jaynie Parham, Ed.D.
Adjunct Professor, Early Childhood
Columbus College
School of Education
Columbus, Georgia 31993
(404) 568-2255

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Polly K. Adams
Jaynie L. Parham

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 018705

HOW DOES YOUR CLASSROOM STACK UP?

"It's big." "Mine's greater than yours." "I like it." "Fourteen units are the same as 28 half units?" "It's little." "It's long." "Hard." "It's smooth." "Light." "Short." "I can stack it." "It balances." "What is it?"

Not surprising these are descriptions by preschoolers and primary graders of one of the most versatile teaching tools in the early childhood classroom--the unit block. Though there are many kinds of blocks, the unit block is the most popular for classroom use. It is wood with a smooth natural finish, and it comes in a variety of sizes and shapes.

The basic unit block is approximately 1 3/8 " X 2 3/4" X 5 1/2", which means it's twice as wide as it is thick, and twice as long as it is wide. The most common variations of unit blocks are the double unit, quadruple unit, curve, small triangle, large triangle, small column, large column, pillar, half pillar, double pillar, and ramp. Less frequently found, but still wonderfully versatile in stimulating creativity and concept formation, are the curve, ellipse, 1/4 and 1/2 circle, arch, floor and roof boards, 1/2 arch, double triangle, gothic door, and large switch.

The companion large blocks also come in a variety of sizes and shapes. The largest are typically 22" X 11" X 5 1/2 ", and they adhere to the basic characteristics of proportion and finish found in unit blocks. These blocks, however, are hollow because of their size; the smaller varieties of these are 1/2 and 1/4 the large size (Hildebrand, 1986).

It is generally recommended that a minimum of 600 unit blocks be housed in a kindergarten class of 20 children (Benisk, 1978). However, others contend that 700 to 1000 unit blocks in 17 to 25 different shapes are needed in the primary grades. Five to seven dozen of the large blocks will be suitable for indoor block play.

Why Blocks?

Blocks have stood the test of time. Over the years children have spent hours stacking, balancing, building, grouping, sorting, spacing, ordering, and planning with blocks (Stallings, 1979). As they play, small and large muscle coordination, as well as hand-eye coordination, is developed. Group play evolves encouraging cooperation and respect for the work of others. A sense of accomplishment is achieved by each child in this noncompetitive activity. Thinking skills such as planning, organizing, testing, estimating, and creating are strengthened. Language development flourishes as children talk among themselves comparing, describing, and labeling structures. Math concepts are evident as blocks are measured, counted, put together in patterns, added, subtracted, compared, and discussed. Concepts of gravity and balance become apparent as children build towers and bridges. Block building is a wonderful form of art in itself; often children decorate their structures with painted signs, trees, backdrops, etc. It is no wonder that blocks are considered a necessity in any Early Childhood classroom.

Children's skills with blocks evolve in predictable developmental stages. For an excellent discussion of children's progression through these stages, consult "The Block Book," by E. Hirsh.

What do you do with blocks?

The goals of block building focus on physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development. These goals are easily met when activities are planned and some guidelines are followed.

To encourage block play, it is strongly recommended that the unit blocks be arranged in open shelving with specified, coded areas and spaces for each shape clearly identified. No other toys should be stored on these shelves. Ample shelving should accommodate all available blocks so that children can easily see, grasp, remove, and return them to neat stacks.

The large blocks are very durable, as are unit blocks, and also have the advantage of being weatherproof and not warping or peeling in even very damp environments. Therefore, these can be stored outside on a covered patio in large packing crates, or inside. To use both inside and outside, put them in a large crate with wheels.

The unit blocks require a space of at least 10 X 12 feet. When located away from the main flow of traffic, block structures may be left from time to time overnight. The large blocks, if portable, can be stored most anywhere and rolled to an open area suitable for gross motor play.

Accessories can easily be added to the block center. The best ones are simple, few in number, and proportionate in size to the blocks. Child-made signs and art work are most effective.

It should be understood early with children that only the amount of blocks needed should be taken from the shelves. Blocks can be added as needed. This makes clean up time easier. Ample warning should be given for clean up. Cartwright (1988) suggests a 10-minute signal be given in the block area.

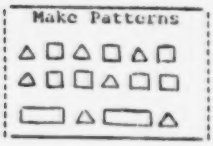
Children seem to understand clearly that blocks are for building. They easily space their creations. Many teachers tend to limit participation to 4 children, and remind each that towers can be as high as you are tall (Cohen & Rudolph, 1977).

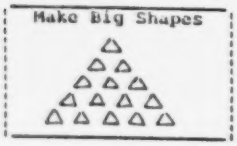
How can I plan for block play?

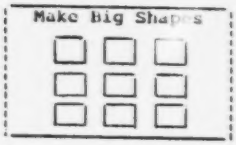
Task cards may be introduced gradually. They are most effective when they relate to what the children are currently studying. For example, a task card directing the children to make a pattern with the blocks might be given when they are studying native Americans and the intricate patterns in their clothing and jewelry. Another task card might have the children build the Eiffel Tower shown on the cover of Madeline.

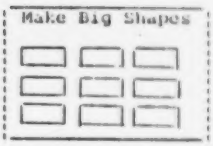
Some sample task cards follow. Each is descriptive enough so the child grasps the idea, but none limits creativity, the pursuit of alternative solutions or ideas, or imagination.

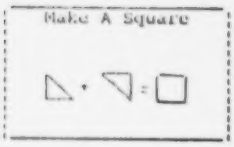
Math

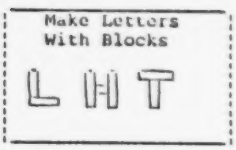


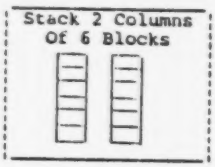


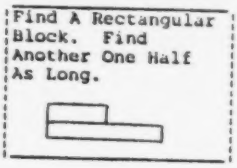


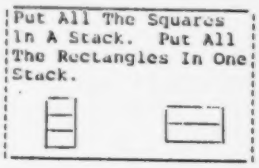


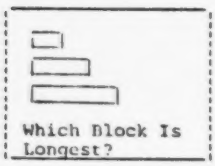


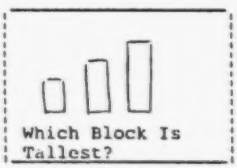


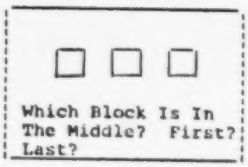


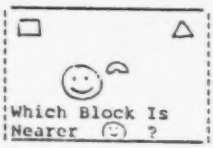


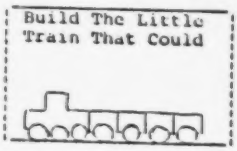




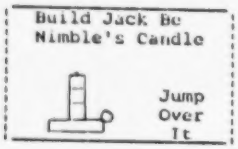


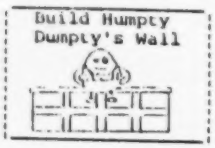


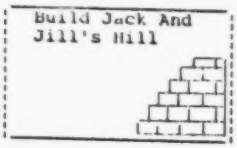


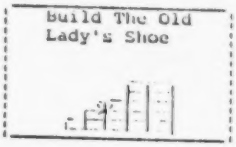


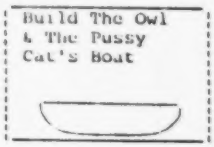
Language Arts

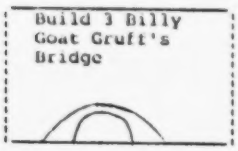


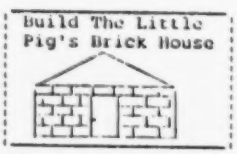


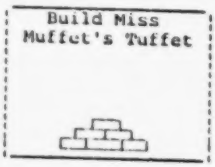


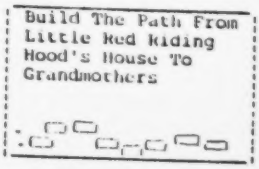




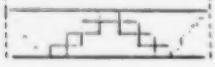
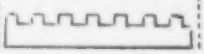




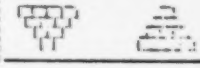


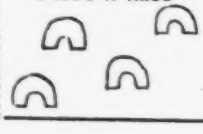


Social Studies

England	France	France	West	China
Build London Bridge 	Build The Tower Of Paris, Madeline	Build Barbar's Car	Build A Teepee	Build The Great Wall 

Science

Build A Tower. Shine A Flash-light. See The Shadow.	Build A Volcano. Put "Lava" In It	Build a Tunnel	Weigh Blocks. Which Is Heavier? Lighter?	Build 2 Towers. Compare 

Build A Ramp. Use It.	Build A Maze 

Sentence strips are also effective, and are similar to task cards in that they offer a direction for involvement in the block center.

If 6 1/2 unit blocks are put in a row, then ____ unit blocks will make the same size row.

When I put 8 unit blocks on one side of a balance scale, I must put ____ double units on the other side to make it even.

It takes ____ unit blocks to go from the block to the table.

It takes ____ large blocks to build a wall 4 feet high and 4 feet long.

How many unit blocks long is your best friend?
How many 1/2 unit blocks long is your best friend?

Will it take more unit blocks to fill a shoebox than it will take quadruple blocks to fill a carton?

How much do 4 quadruple blocks and 8 unit blocks weigh?

Which is longer, 4 quadruple blocks or 18 1/2 unit blocks?

Idea cards are fun and stimulating for everyone's imagination at the primary grade level. Write a brief description on a 4 X 6 index card and tape it to the block shelf where it can be seen easily. Day (1988) offers several excellent suggestions for activities. Try some of these.

Get a doll from the housekeeping area. Build a room for the doll.

Some pretty cloth pieces are on the floor. Use them to decorate a block house.

A runway (road) is taped on the floor. Build an airport (neighborhood).

Our hamster wants to exercise. Come get me (or an assistant) and let's build a maze.

Next week on October 12 we celebrate Columbus Day. Build one of his ships.

The unit blocks and large blocks offer many opportunities for learning and fun. Children through the years have proven time and again the many ways blocks can be used. As teachers, let's continue to use their interest in blocks and motivation to use them as a vehicle for discovery, enrichment, and fulfillment.

References

Benish, J. (1979). Blocks: Essential equipment for young children. Charleston, W. VA: West Virginia Board of Education.

Cartwright, S. (1988). Play can be the building blocks of learning. Young Children, 43 (5), 44-47.

Cohen, D. & Rudolph, M. (1977). Kindergarten and early schooling. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Day, B. (1988). Early childhood education: Creative learning activities (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Hildebrand, V. (1986). Introduction to early childhood education (4th ed.). New York: Macmillan.

Hirsh, E. (Ed.) (1974). The block book. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

Stallings, J. W. (Ed.) (1979). Muscogee County Kindergarten Guide. Columbus, GA: Muscogee County School District.